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## COMMENTARY

# Contract Renewed

By JEB HENSARLING

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This week, Congress will debate the largest federal budget in history. It will hear from thousands of interest groups, but if the past is any indication, one big group will be ignored: American taxpayers.

The budget has grown out of control. Your government now spends over \$23,000 per household, up over \$7,000 in just the last five years. And this record government expansion precedes the coming explosion in the costs of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The next generation will face a choice between two evils -- a crushing tax burden that is double what we pay today, or a federal government that consists entirely of entitlement programs.


The time has come for each member of Congress to show political courage. We must stop politicking and work to provide real solutions to the serious problems that our nation faces.

Today, Dick Armey, one of the authors of the original Contract with America, will be joined by taxpayers from across our country at the Capitol to endorse the American Taxpayer Bill of Rights, which was developed by the Republican Study Committee. These rights represent a renewed contract with all Americans to restore accountability to the halls of Congress.

Here's a glimpse:

- *Taxpayers have a right to have a federal government that does not grow beyond their ability to pay for it.* First and foremost, we must restore fiscal discipline and find innovative new ways to do more with less. The federal budget cannot grow faster than American families' ability to pay for it. Some look at our \$8.8 trillion debt and say now is the time to raise taxes on hard-working Americans. They are wrong. We do not have an \$8.8 trillion debt because Washington taxes too little; we have an \$8.8 trillion debt because Washington spends too much. If families in America can tighten their belts, so too can bureaucrats in Washington. No more hidden earmarks. No more runaway entitlement spending. No more mortgaging our children's future. No more bridges to nowhere.
- *Taxpayers have a right to receive back each dollar that they entrust to the government for their retirement.* A safe, secure and stable retirement is part of the American dream. Yet time and again, Washington has proven itself incapable of managing Americans' hard earned Social Security dollars. There is something fundamentally wrong when more young Americans believe in UFOs than believe that their Social Security benefits will be available they retire. The RSC will propose legislation this year making it against the law to spend Social Security money collected

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from Americans on anything other than Social Security. Ensuring a stable retirement is not a Republican or Democrat obligation, it is an American obligation.

- *Taxpayers have a right to expect the government to balance the budget without having their taxes raised.* Whether it is a water tax, a gas tax, a payroll tax, a utility tax, a cable tax or a property tax, we are taxed from the minute we wake up in the morning to the minute we turn off the lights to go to sleep. You can't say you are fighting for the American taxpayer and support higher taxes. Simply put, a balanced-budget amendment is the only indisputable way to achieve deficit reduction in America, and we pledge to see it through. In 1798, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "I wish it were possible to obtain a single amendment to our Constitution. I would be willing to depend on that alone for the reduction of the administration of our government to the genuine principles of its Constitution. I mean an additional article, taking from the federal government the power of borrowing." More than 200 years later it's the time to make Jefferson's vision a reality.

- *Taxpayers have a right to a simple, fair tax code that they can understand.* We commit to ending the IRS as we know it today. There is something fundamentally wrong when we have a tax code that is seven times longer than the Bible. Though comprehensive tax reform has been on the GOP agenda since 1994, the tax code today remains a nightmare. Believe it or not, it now consists of over 9,000,000 words and forces Americans to work billions of additional hours just trying to figure it out -- let alone afford the bill. Is it any wonder that 60% of Americans pay someone else to prepare their taxes for them? Bottom line: We are an overtaxed nation and we believe that hardworking Americans deserve a break. The tax code has deteriorated beyond repair, and we need to start from scratch. The time has come for Congress to sunset the entire Internal Revenue Code and set a hard date for its final elimination. Only then can we achieve true and meaningful tax reform.

Four simple principles. For those who believe Washington spends too much, we agree. For those who believe Washington still taxes too much, we agree. For those who believe we must balance the budget, cut wasteful Washington spending and provide further, permanent tax relief, we agree. And so we pledge to do it better and get it right. Whoever wants to lead the Republican Party as its Presidential nominee would be wise to adopt these rights. Our leaders must never forget that tax money belongs to the taxpayers, not the government.

***Mr. Hensarling is chairman of the Republican Study Committee, a group of over 100 conservatives in the House of Representatives.***

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